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WHAT QUALITIES OF GREEK AND LATIN LITERATURE
ESPECIALLY ATTRACTED GOETHE?

In my thesis on Goethe and the ancient classical literature¹ I collected considerable material dealing with Goethe's views on the individual Greek and Latin writers. In Goethe's utterances it was observed that certain qualities of literature called forth his admiration again and again, no matter when or where they appeared. Following a suggestion by Professor W. E. Leonard, of the University of Wisconsin, it has seemed worth while to me, as bound to furnish further light on Goethe, to use this same material in another way, viz., to make a list of the various qualities that especially appealed to him, and to quote his exact words on them. This ought to make possible a pretty definite answer to the question: Just what was it that made Goethe admire these two bodies of literature? What are the qualities, especially of Greek literature, that win and hold Goethe so firmly? For that the Greeks were, first and last, his great models, needs no proof; only a few quotations on this point will be enough: "Jeder sei auf seine Art ein Grieche! Aber er sei's."² Again: "Ich habe an der Homerischen, wie an der Nibelungischen Tafel geschmaust, mir aber für meine Person nichts gemässer gefunden, als die breite und tiefe immer lebendige Natur, die Werke der griechischen Dichter und Bildner" (1814)³. Again: the three great tragedians are men "gegen die wir denn doch die Augen aufzuheben uns kaum erkühnen" (1826)⁴. Finally: "Ja, die Alten sind auf jedem Gebiete der heiligen Kunst unerreichbar. Ich glaube auch etwas geleistet zu haben, aber gegen einen der grossen attischen Dichter, wie Aeschylos und Sophokles, bin ich doch gar nichts" (1827).⁵ But more than that. This list of qualities admired by Goethe not only gives light on the Greek and Latin literature, but it indicates what Goethe admired

¹Goethe's Estimate of the Greek and Latin Writers. (Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin, Madison. 1916.)

²I 41² 63. All references are to the Weimar edition, parts I, II, III, and IV, and to Biedermann's edition of the Conversations (G).

³IV 25, 76.

⁴I 42² 464.

⁵G3, 443.

in literature in general; for although, to be sure, his interest in these two literatures represents only a fraction of the immense total amount of work accomplished by Goethe, yet its extent is great.⁶ It is interesting to observe how many of the qualities listed below Goethe appropriated to himself, to his own life and work; some, who know Goethe the man, might almost be inclined to regard the list as one of Goethean qualities.

There is no definite arrangement in the following, except so far as one quality naturally suggests another. Here and there, too, there is some overlapping, but this is unavoidable, for arbitrary lines are impossible. In a few cases, the same utterance is quoted on more than one quality.

(1) *Moderation, temperance, calmness.* Evidently in Goethe's eyes the Greeks lived up to their saying $\mu\eta\delta\epsilon\nu \alpha\gamma\alpha\nu$, for he often has occasion to speak of this quality admiringly. And not only after old age has mellowed him; no, even as a young man, in 1774-5, his soul filled with "Sturm und Drang," does he recognize this quality; in interpreting, according to the studies in physiognomy which he was pursuing with Lavater at that time, a bust of Homer, he says: "Diess ist der Olymp. * * * Ueber das ganze Gesicht * * * solch eine sichere Ruhe verbreitet * * * zwecklos, leidenschaftlos ruht dieser Mann dahin."⁷ At about this time too, he lets his "Werther" say: "Du fragst, ob Du mir meine Bücher schicken sollst. * * * Lieber, ich bitte Dich um Gottes Willen, lass' sie mir vom Halse! Ich will nicht mehr * * * angefeuert sein. * * * Ich brauche Wiegengesang, und den habe ich in seiner Fülle gefunden in meinem Homer."⁸ In possessing this quality, ancient literature is in contrast to the modern; in 1808 Goethe says to Riemer: "Das Antike ist noch bedingt, * * * das Moderne willkürlich, unmöglich. * * * Das Antike ist nüchtern, * * * gemässigt, das Moderne ganz zügellos, betrunken."⁹ This same contrast Goethe finds also in scientific lines; in discussing the little Greek book on colors, ascribed to Theophrastus, Goethe says of the keenness of observation of the author: "wie ruhig

⁶ For example, I have noted in my thesis references to about 165 different Greek and Latin authors whom Goethe has dealt with in one way or another.

⁷ I 37, 339.

⁸ I 19, 10.

⁹ G1, 534.

gegen spätere Zeiten.”¹⁰ In 1809, when Rochlitz had made his German version of the *Antigone* and it was about to be produced on the Weimar stage, Goethe said of it: “Das was wir *** Effekt nennen kann das Stück nicht machen; es wird sich in den Kreis der ruhig edlen Darstellungen mit einschliessen.”¹¹ To Wieland, Goethe says, the Greeks were “höchst schätzbare Muster in ihrer Mässigung.”¹² In 1815, when Goethe is in Heidelberg with S. Boisserée, the latter expresses in the course of a conversation about antiquity his “Verehrung über das glückliche Maashalten in allen ihren (the ancients’) Werken. Goethe sagte darauf: Ja, in allem, auch in ihrem Theater.”¹³

(2) *Simplicity.* Goethe had a real dislike for all ornateness, complexity, elaborateness. Of all the ancient writers, Homer made the greatest appeal to him, and this appeal lay largely in the simplicity of the epic poet. So in the *Werther* the hero says of his Homer: “so beschränkt, und so glücklich waren die herrlichen Altväter, so kindlich ihr Gefühl, ihre Dichtung!”¹⁴ In 1775 Goethe finds himself temporarily at Waldeck, a small village not far from Weimar, and here he very much wants a copy of the *Odyssey*, “denn unmöglich ist die zu entbehren hier in der homerisch einfachen Welt.”¹⁵ When Bodmer’s translation of Homer appears in 1778, Goethe is pleased with it just because it is simple as the original; in Bodmer’s own words: “Auf den Alpen habe er (Goethe) den Homer den Alpinern vorgelesen.* * * Erst jetzt habe man ihn, und wisse, was er sei. Leute von allen Ständen und jedem Alter können ihn verstehn. Man müsse Griechisch können, Stolbergs Homer zu verstehn.”¹⁶ This lack of simplicity is the one fault that Goethe finds with Voss’ translation of Homer, which otherwise he values so highly. So in 1894 Goethe says that in some instances Voss’ language is more abstract than the original warrants;^{17a} in 1813 he again calls attention to the fact that Voss’ translation is too difficult to understand, whereas “diese Dinge

¹⁰ II 3, 117.

¹¹ IV 20, 292.

¹² I 36, 326.

¹³ G2, 344.

¹⁴ I 19, 110.

¹⁵ IV 3, 9.

¹⁶ G1, 100.

^{17a} G1, 215.

zuerst für Kinder und für das Volk calculirt waren;”¹⁷ and as late as 1829 he calls attention to its lack of a naive true feeling for the original.¹⁸ In 1799 he gives as his reason for urging artists to turn to Homer for art subjects the following: “Vieles ist bei ihm schon so lebendig, so einfach * * * dargestellt, dass der bildende Künstler bereits halbgethanne Arbeit findet.”¹⁹ The same advice is given a few years later, in 1803: the artist needs the poet to guide him to Nature, therefore it is best to hold to the oldest of poets “der wahrscheinlich unmittelbar aus der Sage geschöpft, bei dem sie zwar schon dichterisch ausgebildet, aber noch nicht durch spätere Denkweisen umgebildet oder gar mit fremden Zierrathen entstellt worden.”²⁰ The fact that Homer presents only what is necessary and rejects all ornament even in the descriptions and similes is brought out again in 1824.²¹ It is probably this quality of simplicity that makes Goethe turn to Homer for relief from the burden of culture: “noch * * * haben die Homerischen Gesänge die Kraft, uns * * * für Augenblicke von der furchtbaren Last zu befreien, welche die Ueberlieferung von Jahren auf uns gewälzt hat.”²²

But not only in Homer is this quality admired by Goethe. Greek tragedy, which, next to Homer, receives most praise from Goethe of all ancient literature, is also strongly marked by simplicity. And in this field too, as well as in Homer, Goethe as a very young man appreciates simplicity; in *Zum Shäkespeares Tag*, written 1771, he says of Greek tragedy that it presented the great deeds of their ancestors to the people “mit der reinen Einfalt der Vollkommenheit.”²³ In *Der Sammler und die Seinigen* he says that the mere matter of Greek tragedy is often disgusting, but that this matter, when treated by the tragic poets, becomes “erträglich * * * schön, anmuthig * * * durch Einfalt * * *.”²⁴ “Einfalt” is one of the beauties of Aeschylus’ *Philoctetes*,²⁵ of Sophocles’

¹⁷ IV 23, 295.

¹⁸ G4, 100.

¹⁹ I 48, 4.

²⁰ I 48, 59.

²¹ I 42¹ 470 and IV 38, 230.

²² I 42² 191.

²³ I 37, 131.

²⁴ I 47, 166.

²⁵ I 42² 461.

Antigone,²⁶ and of Euripides' *Phaethon*,²⁷ in Sophocles' *Philocetes*, which Goethe believes to be greater than the two lost plays of that name by Aeschylus and Euripides, he finds the "Sitten" of Ulysses "einfacher" than in the other two plays, and the "Sitten" of Neoptolemus to be "die einfachsten."²⁸

In science too, Goethe would look to the Greeks as models in this quality. The language itself is preferable to the Latin for scientific purposes, for it is "durchaus naiver, zu einem natürlichen * * * Vortrag glücklicher Naturansichten viel geschickter."²⁹ And then we have the important utterance with regard to all modern natural science: "Um sich aus der gränzenlosen Vielfachheit, Zerstückelung und Verwickelung der modernen Naturlehre wieder in's Einfache zu retten, muss man sich immer die Frage vorlegen: wie würde sich Plato gegen die Natur, wie sie uns jetzt in ihrer grösseren Mannichfaltigkeit, bei aller gründlichen Einheit, erscheinen mag, benommen haben?"³⁰ And finally may be quoted the following from the *Maximen und Reflexionen*: "Das Wahre, Gute, und Vortreffliche ist einfach und sich immer gleich, wie es auch erscheine. Das Irren aber, * * * ist höchst mannichfaltig, in sich selbst verschieden und nicht allein gegen das Gute und Wahre, sondern auch gegen sich selbst kämpfend, mit sich selbst in Widerspruch."³¹

(3) *Brevity, compactness.* Greek tragedy is also distinguished by this quality. To Riemer Goethe says of tragedy: "Es ist überall nur das Notwendige ad hunc actum angebracht,"³² and again: "Es ist ein enger Kreis von wenigen Figuren, die gleichsam wie Charaktermasken auftreten und wie ein Uhrwerk die Geschichte abspielen."³³ In the *Prolog zu Eröffnung des Berliner Theaters* (1821) he says:

"Ein solches Drama, wer es je gethan,
Es stand dem Griechenvolk am besten an;
Sie haben, grossen Sinns und geistiger Macht,
Mit wenigen Figuren das vollbracht."³⁴

²⁶ IV 20, 292.

²⁷ I 41^a 63.

²⁸ I 42^a 462.

²⁹ II 3, 201.

³⁰ II 11, 150.

³¹ I 42^a 246.

³² G2, 255.

³³ Ib. Cf. G 2, 130 and I 16, 239.

³⁴ I 13^a 116.

In 1827 Goethe says that Byron has profited by limiting himself, in his *Marino Falieri*, in accordance with the model of the Greeks, i.e., by removing all unessential matter.³⁵ Some of Goethe's most extravagant words of praise were given to *Daphnis and Chloe*, the pastoral romance of Longus; one of the many things he admires in it is that, although a complete world is developed in it, yet this is done "bei aller mässigen Abgeschlossenheit" (1831).³⁶ But that this good quality, like all others, may, if carried to excess, become a blemish, is shown in the case of Klopstock, who, in his attempt to compete with the ancients, especially Tacitus, becomes too brief to be any longer intelligible and enjoyable.³⁷

(4) *Unity.* Here is meant, of course, real unity, not anything merely external; Goethe had little use for the traditional three unities; note his phrase "Scylla der drei Einheiten"³⁸ and his characterization of this law of the unities as "das dümmste",³⁹ in fact, he says, sometimes three times three unities, if well interwoven, will have a pleasing effect.⁴⁰ On this point too, Homer stands out. To be sure, at the time when Wolf's *Prolegomena* had appeared and Goethe was beginning to be attracted by the new theory of the composite authorship of the Homeric poems, he tells Wolf why he had not written an epic before: "Schon lange war ich geneigt mich in diesem Fache zu versuchen und immer schreckte mich der hohe Begriff von Einheit und Untheilbarkeit der Homerischen Schriften ab, nunmehr da Sie diese herrlichen Werke einer Familie zueignen, so ist die Kühnheit geringer sich in grössere Gesellschaft zu wagen."⁴¹ But Goethe has by no means given up his belief in the intrinsic unity of the Homeric poems; he goes so far as to say that unity is the very foundation of a poem. For in 1797 he attacks the theory of Friedrich Schlegel, offered in support of Wolf, that an epic poem has no unity and demands none, i.e., says Goethe, "es soll aufhören ein Gedicht zu sein. * * * Denn die Ilias und Odyssee, und wenn sie durch die Hände von

³⁵ IV 42, 112.

³⁶ G4, 347.

³⁷ I 27, 89.

³⁸ G2, 571.

³⁹ G3, 162.

⁴⁰ I 42² 159.

⁴¹ IV 11, 296 (Dec. 26, 1796).

tausend Dichtern * * * gegangen wären, zeigen die gewaltsame Tendenz der poetischen und kritischen Natur nach Einheit.”⁴² And in the next year too (1798) he is more than ever convinced of the unity of the *Iliad*: “Ich bin mehr als jemals von der Einheit und Untheilbarkeit des Gedichtes überzeugt. * * * Die Ilias scheint mir so rund und fertig, man mag sagen was man will, dass nichts dazu noch davon gethan werden kann.”⁴³ It is not strange then to see the joy and almost physical relief that Goethe experienced when in 1821, through the work of Schubarth and others, he got back to the old view of Homer. The best evidence of this is his last utterance on the Homeric question in *Homer noch einmal* (1827): “So haben wir * * * uns im Sondern und Trennen kaum auf den höchsten Grad der Meisterschaft erhoben, als unmittelbar eine neue Generation auftritt, welche * * * uns, nachdem wir den Homer einige Zeit * * * als ein Zusammengefügtes * * * vorgestellt haben, abermals freundlich nöthigt, ihn als eine herrliche Einheit und die unter seinem Namen überlieferten Gedichte als einem einzigen höheren Dichtersinne entquollene Gottesgeschöpfe vorzustellen.”⁴⁴

“Einheit” is the word that characterizes Greek drama too, especially in contrast to Shakspere, e.g.; as early as 1772 Goethe indicates the difference between Shakspere’s and Sophocles’ dramas by saying that it is folly to attempt to reduce the former’s, “deren Wesen Leben der Geschichte ist, auf die Einheit der Sokokleischen, die uns nur That vorstellen.”⁴⁵ This same contrast between the ancients and Shakspere is referred to again many years later (1815), when Goethe says that whereas the ancients reveal the quality of unity in their drama, Shakspere lacks this.⁴⁶

(5) *Wholeness, completeness, perfection.* This quality is not quite the same as unity, but includes it; unity may be said to be the quality of the work of art looked at from within, and wholeness, from without. To take up first a very external point. Although so large a number of Goethe’s own works are incomplete, yet he seemed to have a distinct aversion to fragments, to pieces, as is

⁴² IV 12, 105.

⁴³ IV 13, 148.

⁴⁴ I 41² 236.

⁴⁵ I 37, 227.

⁴⁶ G2, 344.

shown by the fact that so much of the time he devoted to Greek literature was given to attempts at restoration of lost or partly lost dramas; in 1795, e.g., he nourished the plan of completing the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus; in 1797 he speculated about the companion piece to the *Suppliants* of Aeschylus,⁴⁷ and even worked it out but did not put it on paper;⁴⁸ in 1821 and 1826 he worked at restoring the *Phaethon* of Euripides; in 1823 he was interested in restoring the *Niobe* of Aeschylus, and in 1826 the plays of Aeschylus and Euripides on the Philoctetes theme.

As a young boy, he says, he turned from the *Iliad* to the *Aeneid*, dissatisfied with the former because it ended too abruptly and without bringing the story to an end.⁴⁹ Goethe regarded the universe as "ein Ganzes"; everything was a part of one great whole. In this point the Greeks had a strong attraction for him, for their poets regarded Nature "als das schönste, lebendigste Ganze."⁵⁰ And of Plato he says: "Alles was er äussert, bezieht sich auf ein ewig Ganzes, * * * dessen Forderung er in jedem Busen aufzuregen strebt."⁵¹ This idea of wholeness is carried even to the emotions; thus Goethe says of Greek tragedy that it "erregte ganze grosse Empfindungen in den Seelen, denn es war selbst ganz, und gros."⁵² One of the beauties of Homer lies in the fact that the mortal world is reflected in the Olympian world: "Diese Spiegelung tut in jedem poetischen Kunstwerk wohl, weil sie gleichsam eine Totalität hervorbringt und wirklich ein Menschenbedürfnis ist."⁵³ In one place he speaks of the Bible as "eine Totalität,"⁵⁴ and in another he says of Greek poetry: "Alles beruht hier auf allgemeiner gesunder Menschheit, welche sich in verschiedenen abgesonderten Charakteren neben einander als die Totalität einer Welt darstellen soll."⁵⁵

Here belong also the terms "Vollkommenheit" and "Vollendung," with which Goethe characterizes certain works of Greek

⁴⁷ III 2, 68.

⁴⁸ G2, 50.

⁴⁹ I 26, 61.

⁵⁰ II 5² 244.

⁵¹ II 3, 138.

⁵² I 37, 131.

⁵³ G1, 471.

⁵⁴ II 3, 142.

⁵⁵ I 41² 276.

literature, e.g., *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus.⁵⁶ On one occasion he speaks of Greek tragedy as working "mit der reinen Einfalt der Vollkommenheit."⁵⁷ His view of the Aristotelian catharsis is based entirely on this very notion of a complete, rounded-out work of art; the artist has only to do with the *construction* of the work in hand, and does not concern himself at all with its effect on the spectator. As he says in *Nachlese zu Aristoteles Poetik* (1827), the catharsis is "die aussöhrende Abrundung, welche * * * von allem Drama * * * gefordert wird."⁵⁸ And again: "Aristoteles spricht von der Construction der Tragödie, in so fern der Dichter, sie als Object aufstellend, etwas würdig Anziehendes * * * abgeschlossen hervorzubringen denkt."⁵⁹ At this same time (1827) he says in a letter: "Die Vollendung des Kunstwerks in sich selbst ist die ewige unerlässliche Forderung."⁶⁰ And in 1830: "Wir kämpfen für die Vollkommenheit eines Kunstwerks, in und an sich selbst, jene (those who take the other view) denken an dessen Wirkung nach aussen, um welche sich der wahre Künstler gar nicht bekümmert."⁶¹ Although Goethe strongly championed the claims of Euripides as against Aeschylus and Sophocles, yet even in his greatest enthusiasm for Euripides he granted that he *was* inferior; wherein this inferiority lay, at least in part, may be seen from Goethe's statement that Euripides did not possess "die strenge Kunstvollendung" of his two great predecessors.⁶² And so of the age of Augustus Goethe says that it was that time in the development of Latin literature "wo die feinere Sitte * * * das für den Römer erreichbare Gute und Schöne in Vollendung darstellte."⁶³ Horace, too, in the *Ars Poetica*, demands "vollendete Ausführung würdiger * * * Gegenstände. Weil er nun * * * das Rechte verlangt, so wird man immer durch ihn gefördert."⁶⁴ Note also the term "menschlich-vollendet," which Goethe gives as one of the general characteristics not only of Greek tragedy but of the

⁵⁶ G4, 347.

⁵⁷ I 37, 131.

⁵⁸ I 41² 247ff.

⁵⁹ Ib.

⁶⁰ IV 42, 104.

⁶¹ IV 46, 222.

⁶² G3, 360.

⁶³ I 41¹ 361.

⁶⁴ I 27, 392.

whole age and nation;⁶⁵ one thinks here of Goethe's ideal of a rounded-out character.

(6) *Clearness, definiteness, vividness.* Another quality closely akin to the preceding ones, and one which was largely responsible for Goethe's deep admiration for ancient literature was that of clearness, as opposed to vagueness. In encouraging Bürger in his translation of Homer, Goethe urges him to strive "nach der goldnen, einfachen, lebendigen Bestimmtheit des Originals."⁶⁶ In 1809 Goethe speaks of the "Klarheit" of the *Antigone*.⁶⁷ In working at the restoration of Euripides' *Phaethon* Goethe finds that there is no trace of that confusion with which Ovid and Nonnus (in treating the fable of Phaethon) destroy the universe.⁶⁸ Of *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus Goethe says in 1831: "Es ist eine bewundernswürdige Tagesklarheit in dieser Darstellung,"⁶⁹ and again: "Es ist darin der hellste Tag."⁷⁰ Not always, to be sure, does Goethe find this desirable quality present even in Greek works; at least that is the case with the *Anthology*, for after studying its thirty-six epigrams on the subject of Myron's cow, he confesses that they have helped him very little to gain a distinct impression of this work of art, for they lack clear presentation.⁷¹ The Latin writers, it would seem, possess this quality, in Goethe's opinion, in as great a degree as the Greeks, a thing that is not the case in most of the qualities here being considered. Thus the "Klarheit der Behandlung" of Terence is praised;⁷² Curtius, the Roman historian of the first century, receives a tribute for his great vividness: "Welche Anschaulichkeit, welche Klarheit der Darstellung!"⁷³ And of Statius Goethe says: "ich bewundere an ihm die Kunst, * * * sinnfällige Dinge aufzufassen und genau wiederzugeben. * * * Alle Dinge, die er mit Worten beschreibt, scheinen uns vor die Augen geführt zu werden."⁷⁴ In Goethe's general characteriza-

⁶⁵ G3, 387.

⁶⁶ I 37, 360.

⁶⁷ IV 20, 292.

⁶⁸ I 41^a 40.

⁶⁹ III 13, 48.

⁷⁰ G4, 347.

⁷¹ I 49^a 3ff.

⁷² III 12, 314f.

⁷³ G2, 431.

⁷⁴ G2, 262.

tion of the difference between ancient and modern literature, as reported by Riemer, he says: "Das Antike ist plastisch * * *; das Romantische täuschend wie die Bilder einer Zauberlaterne."⁷⁵

Under this head belongs probably Goethe's use of the words "rein" and "Reinheit," denoting that which is clearly defined, clean-cut. So he says of Homer's descriptions and similes that they are "gezeichnet mit Reinheit";⁷⁶ Euripides, too, shows "die grösste Reinheit";⁷⁷ Menander is "rein";⁷⁸ of Theophrastus' powers of observation he says: "wie rein!";⁷⁹ and among the Latins there is "der himmelreine Virgil."⁸⁰ To Wieland the Greeks were valuable models in their "Reinheit."⁸¹

(7) *Variety, abundance, richness, splendor.* And yet Goethe is not blind to the beauty of variety, etc., in spite of the emphasis on the preceding qualities. In 1784 Herder's work on the *Anthology* attracts Goethe's attention. He becomes quite enthusiastic about these poems, and mentions as one of the admirable qualities "die reizende Manigfaltigkeit der Erfindung."⁸² The *Daphnis and Chloe* is strong in this respect; in 1807 he has noted "dass der Autor einen grossen Reichthum von Motiven * * * zusammengefunden und besonders das Hauptmotiv der Retardation in der grössten Manigfaltigkeit zu benutzen gewusst";⁸³ in 1811 he speaks of "der reiche Gehalt" of this same work;⁸⁴ in 1814 he calls it "ein Meisterstück poetischer Entfaltung eines gegebenen reichhaltigen Gegenstandes";⁸⁵ and in 1831 he says that, in spite of its brevity, there has been developed in it "eine vollständige Welt" and that "kein Motiv fehlt."⁸⁶ In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he speaks of "die Fülle des Plato."⁸⁷ Homer's similes have "Fülle und Herr-

⁷⁵ G1, 534.

⁷⁶ I 31, 238.

⁷⁷ III 13, 177.

⁷⁸ G3, 203.

⁷⁹ II 3, 117.

⁸⁰ IV 14, 181.

⁸¹ I 36, 326.

⁸² IV 6, 400.

⁸³ III 3, 214.

⁸⁴ IV 22, 181.

⁸⁵ IV 24, 382.

⁸⁶ G4, 347.

⁸⁷ I 27, 12.

lichkeit.”⁸⁸ Pindar's odes have such a mighty effect because “die Herrlichkeiten grosser Städte, ganzer Länder und Geschlechtsfolgen” serve as foundation to them.⁸⁹ Of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* he says: “Die Poesie verdient sich das Lob einer ernsten Pracht. Ein grosser Reichthum von Stoff und Gehalt ist diesem Stücke eigen.”⁹⁰ That is, even in Greek tragedy does Goethe find abundance and complication admirable when done well, as for example by Euripides; only a few months before his death Goethe writes that what most aroused his wonder for Euripides at that time was “das so gränzenlose als kräftige Element worauf er sich bewegt. Auf den griechischen Localitäten und auf deren *** Legenden-Masse schifft und schwimmt er. *** Alles ist ihm zur Hand: Stoff, Gehalt, Bezüge, Verhältnisse; er darf nur zugreifen, um seine Gegenstände und Personen in dem einfachsten Decurs vorzuführen oder die verwickeltesten Verschränkungen noch mehr zu verwirren.”⁹¹

(8) *Positiveness, construction.* Goethe wants to build up, not destroy. Note in this connection the characters of his Faust and of Mephistopheles, the spirit of negation. Goethe contrasts with Aesop and Socrates, who are constructive, the satirist Lichtenberg, who finds his pleasure in caricature, and who aims only at the discovery of weaknesses.⁹² As my thesis brought out, Goethe takes little interest in satirists; Lucian, Lucilius, and Juvenal are passed over lightly. For travesty, parody, caricature, belittling of the noble, Goethe has little use. The difference in his attitude toward comedy and tragedy is also noticeable; toward tragedy it is almost worship, toward Aristophanes it is rather a pleasant patronage; compare the following, which is one of a series of contrasts between ancient and modern literature, all much to the disadvantage of the modern: “Das Romantische grenzt ans Komische, das Antike ans Ernste und Würdige.”⁹³ The satyr-play was a troublesome problem to him until he came to the conclusion that it was not the same in kind with the modern “Possen- und Fratzen-

⁸⁸ I 41¹ 507.

⁸⁹ I 42¹ 163.

⁹⁰ I 42² 463.

⁹¹ IV 49, 146 (Nov. 23, 1831).

⁹² G1, 409.

⁹³ G1, 534.

stück," nor with parody or travesty, but that, rather, it was a real part of the tetralogy, written in the same lofty style; in it the noble is not debased, but the brutal, the low is lifted up by the poet's art.⁹⁴ In the *Maximen und Reflexionen* Goethe holds up the Greek in preference to the Latin on this point of positiveness: "Bei den Griechen, deren Poesie und Rhetorik einfach und positiv war, erscheint die Billigung öfter als die Missbilligung; bei den Lateinern hingegen ist es umgekehrt, und je mehr sich Poesie und Redekunst verdirbt, desto mehr wird der Tadel wachsen und das Lob sich zusammenziehen."⁹⁵

(9) *Realism, life, nature, observation, the present.* This quality is emphasized by Goethe perhaps more than any other in ancient literature; he finds it in every sphere of Greek life and is always filled with admiration for it. Homer possesses it in a high degree, and Goethe never tires of praising him for it. In 1772 he says that Homer is one of the authors who, together with Nature, must be studied by actors if the stage is to be elevated as it should be.⁹⁶ In relating the story of this year (1772) in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he says: "Auch das Homerische Licht ging uns neu wieder auf. *** Wir sahen nun nicht mehr in jenen Gedichten ein angespanntes und aufgedunsenes Heldenwesen, sondern die abgespiegelte Wahrheit einer uralten Gegenwart."⁹⁷ In 1774 Werther is made to say: "Wenn Ulyss von dem ungemessnen Meer und von der unendlichen Erde spricht, das ist so wahr."⁹⁸ In 1775, in a conversation with Bodmer, Goethe dwells on the naturalness of Homer's characters.⁹⁹ During the Italian Journey he writes, thinking especially of the *Odyssey*: "Die Beschreibungen, die Gleichnisse, u. s. w. kommen uns poetisch vor und sind doch unsäglich natürlich * * *. Selbst die sonderbarsten erlogenen Begebenheiten haben eine Natürlichkeit, die ich nie so gefühlt habe als in der Nähe der beschriebenen Gegenstände."¹⁰⁰ Ten years later, in 1798, speaking of this same experience, he writes: "Ich gestehe dass es (the

⁹⁴ I 42° 468 and IV 42, 220.

⁹⁵ I 42° 246.

⁹⁶ I 38, 344.

⁹⁷ I 28, 145.

⁹⁸ I 19, 110.

⁹⁹ G1, 58.

¹⁰⁰ I 31, 238.

Odyssey) mir aufhörte ein Gedicht zu sein, es schien die Natur selbst.”¹⁰¹ The next year (1799) he urges artists to seek subjects in Homer, for “Vieles ist bei ihm schon so lebendig * * * und wahr dargestellt, dass der bildende Künstler bereits halbgethane Arbeit findet.”¹⁰² In 1809 we again find Homer and Nature paired: “Verfälscht ist alles, was uns von der Natur trennt; der Weg der Natur aber ist derselbe, auf dem ihr Baco, Homer und Shakespeare notwendig begegnen müsst.”¹⁰³ And finally for Homer, one of the *Maximen* reads: “Der für dichterische * * * Schöpfungen empfängliche Geist fühlt sich dem Alterthum gegenüber in den anmuthigst-ideellen Naturzustand versetzt; und noch auf den heutigen Tag haben die Homerischen Gesänge die Kraft, uns wenigstens für Augenblicke von der furchtbaren Last zu befreien, welche die Ueberlieferung von * * * Jahren auf uns gewälzt hat.”¹⁰⁴

This quality is also characteristic of the Greek philosophers; Goethe says of them: “Die Griechen, welche zu ihren Naturbetrachtungen aus den Regionen der Poesie herüberkamen, erhielten sich dabei noch dichterische Eigenschaften. Sie schauten die Gegenstände tüchtig und lebendig und fühlten sich gedrungen, die Gegenwart lebendig auszusprechen.”¹⁰⁵ One of the admirable traits of Socrates to Goethe was “das derbe tüchtige Halten auf einer verständigen Gegenwart.”¹⁰⁶ Of Plato he says: “Alles was er äussert, bezieht sich auf ein ewig * * * Wahres.”¹⁰⁷ Aristotle receives strong tributes on this point. In 1827, i.e., when he is 78 years old, Goethe says that if he had the strength he would devote himself entirely to the study of Greek: “Die Natur und Aristoteles würden mein Augenmerk sein. Es ist über alle Begriffe, was dieser Mann erblickte, sah, schaute, bemerkte, beobachtete.”¹⁰⁸ The next year: “Aristoteles hat die Natur besser gesehen als irgendein Neuerer”,¹⁰⁹ and again: “Wenn man die Proben-

¹⁰¹ IV 13, 65.

¹⁰² I 48, 4.

¹⁰³ G2, 24.

¹⁰⁴ I 42² 191.

¹⁰⁵ II 3, 109.

¹⁰⁶ I 42² 25.

¹⁰⁷ II 3, 138.

¹⁰⁸ IV 42, 104.

¹⁰⁹ G4, 23.

leme des Aristoteles ansieht, so erstaunt man über die Gabe des Bemerkens und für was alles die Griechen Augen gehabt haben.”¹¹⁰ And Theophrastus, or whoever the author of the Greek work on colors may be, is also admired for this quality, for Goethe says: “Welch ein Aufmerken, welch ein Anpassen auf jede Bedingung, unter welcher diese Erscheinung zu beobachten ist.”¹¹¹

In Greek tragedy Goethe does not emphasize this quality so frequently, although utterances show that here too he is attracted by it. In a series of contrasts between ancient and modern tragedy, the former is characterized as “real,” the latter as “ideal.”¹¹² In the lack of this quality, as well as that of “Kunstvollendung,” may perhaps be seen a cause of Euripides’ inferiority to Aeschylus and Sophocles, for even Goethe grants that “die Art des Sophokles und Aeschylos hat etwas, was näher an die Natur geht.”¹¹³

The Greek historians too possess this quality, not only the poets: “Warum sind ihre Dichter und Geschichtschreiber die Bewunderung des Einsichtigen, die Verzweiflung des Nacheifernen, als weil jene handelnden Personen, die aufgeführt werden, an ihrem eigenen Selbst, an dem engen Kreise ihres Vaterlandes *** einen so tiefen Anteil nahmen, mit allem Sinn, aller Neigung, aller Kraft auf die Gegenwart wirkten ***. Alle (der Dichter, der Geschichtschreiber, der Forscher) hielten sich am Nächsten, Wahren, Wirklichen fest, und selbst ihre Phantasiebilder haben Knochen und Mark.”¹¹⁴ With this last thought compare: Greek poetry is that art of poetry, “welche dahin strebt, dass der Einbildungskraft Gehalt, Gestalt und Form dargebracht werde, so dass sie sich daran als an einem Wirklichen beschäftigen und erbauen könne.”¹¹⁵

Although Goethe has very little to say about the individual Greek orators, yet he appreciates that this quality was common to all of them; in discussing his early rhetorical studies he says: “Meine Bekanntschaft mit so vielem Guten jener alten Zeiten (the works of the Greek poets and orators) war *** immer nur

¹¹⁰ IV 45, 12.

¹¹¹ II 3, 117.

¹¹² I 41¹ 59.

¹¹³ G4, 395.

¹¹⁴ I 46, 22.

¹¹⁵ I 41² 276.

schul-und buchmässig und keineswegs lebendig, da es doch, besonders bei den gerühmtesten Rednern, auffiel, dass sie sich durchaus im Leben gebildet hatten, und das man von den Eigenchaften ihres Kunstcharactors niemals sprechen konnte, ohne ihren persönlichen Gemüthscharacter zugleich mitzuerwähnen.”¹¹⁶ With respect to Greek lyric poetry Goethe finds the same true; on one occasion he asks: “Warum sind die Gedichte * * * der alten Griechen * * * so stark, so feurig, so gross? Die Natur trieb sie zum Singen wie den Vogel in der Luft. Uns*** treibt ein gemachtes Gefühl, das wir * * * dem Wohlgefallen an den Alten zu danken haben, zu der Leier.”¹¹⁷ Compare with this: “Das antike Tragische ist das menschlich Tragierte. Das Romantische ist kein Natürliche * * * sondern ein Gemachtes, ein Gesuchtes. * * * Das Antike ist * * * wahr und reell.”¹¹⁸ Finally in regard to this quality as found particularly among the Greeks, note that “reinkräftige Anschauung” is one of the great qualities that Goethe finds not only in their dramatic but also in their lyric and epic works, furthermore in the philosophers, orators and historians, i.e., this is one of the characteristics that make Greek literature great in all its forms.¹¹⁹

Of the Latins individually Goethe has little to say in regard to this quality, and yet there are a few utterances. Goethe uses the work “charakteristisch” as equivalent to “realistisch,” and so when he speaks of a performance of Terence’s *Adelphi* (in a German version) as “eine derbe, charakteristische Darstellung,”¹²⁰ he shows that he finds this desirable quality in Terence. The power of observation is one of the things that make Lucretius great: “Was unsfern Lucrez als Dichter so hoch stellt und seinen Rang auf ewige Zeiten sichert, ist ein hohes tüchtig-sinnliches Anschauungsvermögen, welches ihn zu kräftiger Darstellung befähigt.”¹²¹ Horace, in the *Ars Poetica*, demands “die Ausführung charakteristischer Gegenstände,” and that is “das Rechte.”¹²² And Seneca, because of

¹¹⁶ I 28, 148.

¹¹⁷ I 37, 217.

¹¹⁸ G1, 534.

¹¹⁹ G3, 387.

¹²⁰ I 40, 76.

¹²¹ IV 34, 125.

¹²² I 27, 392.

the lack of this quality, becomes unbearable, even ridiculous; for certain passages in his works make it very apparent "dass die Redekunst aus dem Leben sich in die Schulen * * * zurückgezogen hat."¹²³ In conclusion may be quoted an utterance on both Greeks and Latins: "Man spricht immer vom Studium der Alten, allein was will das anders sagen als: Richte dich auf die wirkliche Welt und suche sie auszusprechen, denn das taten die Alten auch, da sie lebten."¹²⁴

(10) *Action, experience.* Closely allied to the preceding is that quality of the ancients which made them insist on experience rather than theory, on deeds rather than speculation. As Goethe puts it: "Das, was geschah, hatte für sie den einzigen Werth, so wie für uns nur dasjenige, was gedacht oder empfunden worden, einigen Werth zu gewinnen scheint."¹²⁵ Thus "Heroischer Gesang" (Homer) strides back and forth "auf Thatenfeldern."¹²⁶ Greek tragedy is "naiv" and "heldenhaft," whereas modern tragedy is "sentimental" and "romantisch."¹²⁷ (With this idea of "heldenhaft" cf. Faust's attitude of mind after his intercourse with the Greek Helen: he is eager to do heroic deeds.) Furthermore, the dramas of Shakspere, the essence of which is "Leben der Geschichte," differ from those of Sophocles, "die uns nur That vorstellen."¹²⁸ Socrates, the "Heidengeist," attracts Goethe so strongly because his philosophy is practical rather than speculative; Goethe says: "Man denke sich das Grosse der Alten, vorzüglich der Sokratischen Schule, dass sie die Quelle und Richtschnur alles Lebens und Thuns vor Augen stellt, nicht zu leerer Spekulation, sondern zu Leben und That auffordert."¹²⁹ For the same reason he is attracted to Hippocrates and to Aristotle. Compare in this connection the striking utterance of Goethe in the diary for Jan. 13, 1779: "Lehrbuch und Geschichte sind gleich lächerlich dem Handelnden."¹³⁰

¹²³ II 3, 124.

¹²⁴ G3, 253. Cf. also I 28, 148; 30, 182; 49¹ 63; III 3, 378.

¹²⁵ I 46, 22.

¹²⁶ I 16, 210.

¹²⁷ I 41¹ 59.

¹²⁸ I 37, 227.

¹²⁹ I 42² 190.

¹³⁰ III 1, 77.

(11) *Imagination.* In spite of all this emphasis on realism, Goethe, of course, insists also on the rights of the imagination and attacks any attempt to degrade realism to mere naturalism. In recounting the time when, as a boy, he first came to know Homer, he says that the copper plates in the prose translation that he used so spoiled his imagination that for a long time he could picture to himself the Homeric heroes only in these forms.¹³¹ And not only was he so affected when a boy, but also as an old man of seventy; in 1820 he says of certain etchings representing modern views of the plain of Troy and other places: "Durch die Uebersicht der Ebene von Troja ist die Ilias aufgehoben, beynahe geht es der Aeneis nicht besser in den Sümpfen von Ostia."¹³² Dwelling on this point again in the *Annals* for 1820 he says that these etchings are a sad example of the modern realistic tendency: "Denn was kann wohl trauriger sein, als einem Dichter aufhelfen zu wollen durch Darstellung wüster Gegenden? Muss man denn nicht schon annehmen, dass Virgil zu seiner Zeit Mühe gehabt sich jenen Urzustand der lateinischen Welt zu vergegenwärtigen, um die längst verlassenen Städte einigermassen vor den Römern seiner Zeit dichterisch aufzustutzen?"¹³³

For the mere matter of Greek tragedy Goethe has little use; thus he says: "Wenn man vom Kunstwerke spricht, als hätte man, an seiner Statt, die Begebenheiten in der Natur erfahren, dann lassen sich wohl sogar Sophokleische Tragödien als ekelhaft und abscheulich darstellen."¹³⁴ Often, says Goethe, one hears people express a desire, after they have finished a good novel, to see it produced on the stage, and how many poor dramas have resulted! "Damit nur ja ihrer Imagination keine Thätigkeit übrig bleibe, so soll alles sinnlich wahr, *** dramatisch seyn, und das dramatische selbst soll sich dem wirklich wahren an die Seite stellen. Diesen eigentlich kindischen *** Tendenzen sollte *** der Künstler *** widerstehen."¹³⁵ One of the evidences of the greatness of the Greeks is that they cared less about the

¹³¹ I 26, 61.

¹³² IV 33, 131.

¹³³ I 36, 168.

¹³⁴ I 47, 166.

¹³⁵ IV 12, 382.

historical accuracy of an event than about the poet's treatment of it.¹³⁶ On this point cf. *Faust*:

"Nicht vergleicht sich dein Erzählen
Dem was liebliche Lüge,
Glaubhaftiger als Wahrheit,
Von dem Sohne sang der Maja!"¹³⁷

Of the Latins, Lucretius is assured immortality by his two great qualities "Anschauungsvermögen" and "eine lebendige Einbildungskraft, * * * um das Angeschaute bis in die unschaubaren Tiefen der Natur, auch über die Sinne hinaus, in alle geheimsten Schlupfwinkel zu verfolgen."¹³⁸ Lucretius also furnishes splendid examples of imitative and productive imagination.¹³⁹ In the case of Horace the lack of this quality is indicated by Goethe's words to the effect that he recognizes Horace's poetic talent only in his technic and diction "nebst einer furchtbaren Realität ohne alle eigentliche Poesie, besonders in den Oden."¹⁴⁰

(12) *Bigness, greatness.* This quality belongs rather to the Greeks than to the Latins, judging by Goethe's utterances, although in the first passage quoted he may be thinking of the latter also; he says that the study of art, like that of the ancient writers, fills "unser Inneres mit grossen Gegenständen und Gesinnungen."¹⁴¹ But it is the Greeks who possess this quality in great measure; all forms of their literature, dramatic, lyric, and epic poetry, philosophy, oratory, and history, are stamped with the characteristic of "des Grossartigen."¹⁴² Homer's great characters are "vor unser Auge fast nicht von den Göttern zu scheiden."¹⁴³ Interpreting a bust of Homer at the time of his studies in physiognomy he says: "Diess ist der Schädel, in dem die ungeheuren Götter und Helden so viel Raum haben, als im weiten Himmel und der gränzenlosen Erde."¹⁴⁴ In the *Maskenzug* of 1818 Epic Poetry (=Homer) speaks the words: "Dem Allergrössten war ich stets ver-

¹³⁶ G3, 340.

¹³⁷ I. 9629 ff. Cf. also I 31, 238.

¹³⁸ IV 34, 125.

¹³⁹ Ib. 136.

¹⁴⁰ G1, 458.

¹⁴¹ I 33, 188.

¹⁴² G3, 387.

¹⁴³ I 38, 384.

¹⁴⁴ I 37, 339.

traut.”¹⁴⁵ So it is with the lyric poetry; Goethe asks: “Warum sind die Gedichte * * * der alten Griechen * * * so gross?”¹⁴⁶ Greek tragedy, too, is stamped with this characteristic; it “zeigte grosse Handlungen der Väter dem Volck, * * * erregte * * * grosse Empfindungen in den Seelen, denn es war selbst * * * gros.”¹⁴⁷ In the early period of the development of the chorus, the choral song presents “grosse Thaten, ungeheure Schicksale.”¹⁴⁸ Modern tragedy, Goethe says, is based on the “I will” and thereby becomes “schwach und klein”; but Greek tragedy is based on the “I ought” and thereby becomes “gross und stark.”¹⁴⁹ In the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus we have “eine uralte Riesengestalt, geformt wie Ungeheuer.”¹⁵⁰ The same poet’s *Philoctetes*, although in fragmentary form, Goethe admires for its “Seelengrösse.”¹⁵¹ Of the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles Goethe says: “Die Sitten des Neoptolemus sind die grossartigsten.”¹⁵² Euripides’ *Phaethon* is “unglaublich grossgedacht”,¹⁵³ its “Grossheit” is mentioned in another place.¹⁵⁴ The great tragedians lived in an age which wanted “nur immer das wirklich Grösste und Beste.”¹⁵⁵ The mere matter of Greek tragedies, sometimes actually disgusting, becomes, when treated by the poets, “erträglich * * *, schön, anmutig * * * durch Einfalt und stille Grösse,”¹⁵⁶ Goethe in these words using Winckelmann’s well-known phrase. Menander, judged even by his few fragments, is “gross”;¹⁵⁷ Socrates is “ein grosser Mensch”¹⁵⁸ and “grossdenkend.”¹⁵⁹ Horace works “mit grossem Sinne” in his *Ars Poetica*,¹⁶⁰ and the “grosse Ge-

¹⁴⁵ I 16, 255.

¹⁴⁶ I 37, 217.

¹⁴⁷ Ib. 131.

¹⁴⁸ IV 16, 264.

¹⁴⁹ I 41¹ 61.

¹⁵⁰ IV 27, 156.

¹⁵¹ I 42² 461.

¹⁵² Ib.

¹⁵³ IV 35, 192.

¹⁵⁴ I 41⁶³.

¹⁵⁵ G3, 305.

¹⁵⁶ I 47, 166.

¹⁵⁷ G3, 203.

¹⁵⁸ IV 2, 11.

¹⁵⁹ I 28, 266.

¹⁶⁰ I 27, 392.

danken”¹⁶¹ of Manilius are mentioned. Here may be added that broadness of view which Goethe finds and admires in several places; speaking of Theophrastus he calls attention to his “freies Ueberschauen der Welt”¹⁶² and his “freye, weite Uebersicht über die Phänomene.”¹⁶³ This same “weite Uebersicht der Welt” is an admirable quality of the *Anthology*,¹⁶⁴ and “weitere Weltum-sicht” was one of the things that brought Roman culture to its high level.¹⁶⁵

(13) *Loftiness, dignity, nobility.* The lofty style of the ancients is often mentioned, e.g., Homer’s.¹⁶⁶ Wieland, in his *Alceste*, seemed to Goethe¹⁶⁷ to have sinned against the Greeks and their lofty style.¹⁶⁸ From the fragments of Aeschylus’ *Philoctetes* Goethe concludes that this drama contained “Nichts Geschwätziges, oder Niedriges.”¹⁶⁹ In connection with Sophocles’ *Oedipus Colonus* Goethe uses the phrase “erhabene Heiligkeit.”¹⁷⁰ The *Phaethon* of Euripides leads us “zum Höchsten und Würdigsten”;¹⁷¹ even in discussing this poet’s satyr-play, the *Cyclops*, Goethe insists on this quality: one must not think of the satyr-play as parody: “Nein! bey den Griechen ist alles * * * im grossen Styl, * * * und immer der gleiche Geist, der allem die gebührende Würde verleiht.”¹⁷² The matter is so treated by the poet “dass wir dasselbe * * * als an dem Erhabenen theilnehmend empfinden.”¹⁷³ In connection with the above phrase “Nichts Geschwätziges” may we not see a reason for Goethe’s neglect of Lucian? For note the following, entitled *Lucian*:

“Nun, Freund, bist du versöhnt mit den Philosophen? Du hast sie
Oben im Leben, das weiss Jupiter! tüchtig geneckt.”

¹⁶¹ I 37, 100.

¹⁶² II 5² 239.

¹⁶³ Ib. 240.

¹⁶⁴ IV 6, 400.

¹⁶⁵ I 41¹ 361.

¹⁶⁶ I 42² 470.

¹⁶⁷ I 28, 327.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. also IV 12, 83.

¹⁶⁹ I 42² 461.

¹⁷⁰ I 33, 192.

¹⁷¹ I 41² 63.

¹⁷² I 42² 468.

¹⁷³ Ib.

"Rede leiser, mein Freund. Zwar hab' ich die Narren gezüchtigt,
Aber mit vielem Geschwätz oft auch die Klugen geplagt."¹⁷⁴

Roman poetry, too, attained this style.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, this loftiness has to do with more than style; the writers themselves have this quality. Thus Goethe speaks of "die hohe Seele" of Sophocles,¹⁷⁶ and again: "Hat ein Poet den hohen Gehalt der Seele wie Sophokles, so wird seine Wirkung immer sittlich sein."¹⁷⁷ Menander is called "edel"¹⁷⁸ And finally on this point, one of the great traits that stamp all Greek literature is "die erhabene Denkungsweise."¹⁷⁹

(14) *Humanness.* And yet this loftiness and elevation must not be carried to an extreme; it must not destroy the purely human side. Goethe has little use for "saintliness"; in his early enthusiasm for Socrates he says that that philosopher appears to him to be "statt des Heiligen ein grosser Mensch."¹⁸⁰ Homer is "menschlich"¹⁸¹ and the influence that the gods exert in him is "unendlich menschlich."¹⁸² It is this quality that largely attracts Goethe so strongly to Plutarch:

"Was hat dich nur von uns entfernt?" Hab' immer den Plutarch gelesen.
"Was hast du denn dabei gelernt?" Sind eben alles Menschen gewesen."¹⁸³

"Das rein menschliche in seinem ganzen Umfange" is the specific subject of Greek tragedy;¹⁸⁴ moreover, in Greek poetry, says Goethe, everything is based "auf allgemeiner gesunder Menschheit."¹⁸⁵

(15) *Genuineness.* Among the things that Goethe admires in Aeschylus' *Philoctetes* is the "Festsinn" and the fact that there is in the drama "nichts Tückisches."¹⁸⁶ Socrates is characterized by

¹⁷⁴ I 5¹ 257.

¹⁷⁵ I 41¹ 361.

¹⁷⁶ G3, 340.

¹⁷⁷ Ib. 356.

¹⁷⁸ G3, 203.

¹⁷⁹ G3, 387.

¹⁸⁰ IV 2, 11.

¹⁸¹ I 19, 110.

¹⁸² G4, 218.

¹⁸³ I 3, 307.

¹⁸⁴ G3, 364.

¹⁸⁵ I 41² 276.

¹⁸⁶ I 42² 461.

"Gerad-und Rechtsinn" and by "Unbestechlichkeit gegen jede Art von Umgebung."¹⁸⁷ "Das Tüchtige" is one of the great traits of all Greek literature.¹⁸⁸

(16) *Soundness.* In this quality, too, "das Gesunde," we have a trait of all Greek literature.¹⁸⁹ Goethe finds fault with Wieland, who did not seem to want to recognize "die derbe gesunde Natur" which forms the basis of Greek literature.¹⁹⁰ In possessing this quality ancient literature is superior to modern romantic literature; Goethe speaks of romantic "Krankheitsfälle," which are epidemic among moderns, but rare among ancients.¹⁹¹ So, too, he says: "Das Klassische nenne ich das Gesunde, und das Romantische das Kranke. Da sind die Nibelungen klassisch wie der Homer, denn beide sind gesund und tüchtig. * * * Das Alte ist nicht klassisch, weil es alt, sondern weil es * * * frisch * * * und gesund ist."¹⁹²

(17) *Strength, fire.* Because Nature drove the old Greek poets to sing, their poems are "stark" and "feurig."¹⁹³ In the *Wanderers Sturmlied*, written at the time when Goethe was very enthusiastic about Pindar, "Gluht" is the quality of that poet that is uppermost in Goethe's mind.¹⁹⁴ In Homer's bust Goethe sees, according to his studies in physiognomy, "Festigkeit."¹⁹⁵ If, among other qualities, a work of literature is "stark," it is classic, whether ancient or modern.¹⁹⁶ Nonnus, whom Goethe admired to a considerable extent, is "ein kräftiger Poet."¹⁹⁷

(18) *Delicacy, charm.* But the quality of delicacy also makes its appeal to Goethe. Referring to the influence that the gods exert in Homer, Goethe says: "es ist unendlich zart."¹⁹⁸ Aristophanes is called "der Liebling der Grazien."¹⁹⁹ Of Menander Goethe

¹⁸⁷ Ib. 25.

¹⁸⁸ G3, 387.

¹⁸⁹ Ib.

¹⁹⁰ I 28, 327.

¹⁹¹ I 42² 247.

¹⁹² G1, 343.

¹⁹³ I 37, 217.

¹⁹⁴ I 2, 69.

¹⁹⁵ I 37, 339.

¹⁹⁶ G1, 343.

¹⁹⁷ IV 24, 259.

¹⁹⁸ G4, 218.

¹⁹⁹ I 17, 114.

says: "Seine Anmut ist unerreichbar."²⁰⁰ The *Anthology* appeals to him with its "Lieblichkeit."²⁰¹ The much admired *Daphnis and Chloe* of Longus is "von der höchsten Milde" and contains "Delikatesse der Empfindung, die sich dem Besten gleichstellt, das je gemacht worden!"²⁰² In Latin literature Lucretius helped form the epoch in which Roman poetry had reached the lofty style: "Die alte, tüchtige, barsche Rohheit war gemildert"; and then Roman culture had been brought to the marvelous stage "wo Kraft und Ernst sich mit Anmuth, wo starke gewaltige Aeusserungen sich mit Gefälligkeit vermählen konnten,"²⁰³ i.e., not in any one of these qualities taken alone, but in the combination of them does the highest development lie. In Terence Goethe finds "die höchste Keuschheit, Nettigkeit * * * der Behandlung."²⁰⁴

(19) *Cheerfulness.* Goethe's optimism is seen in his demand for cheerfulness. He contrasts, in 1827, the "Lazarett-Poesie" of the day with the genuine poetry of Tyrtaeus, which equips men with courage for life.²⁰⁵ In comparing Wieland with Anacreon, Goethe speaks of the rich wreath that the former's "geistreiche Lebensfreude" deserves.²⁰⁶ Theognis, at first, did not appeal to Goethe at all, for all he saw in him was "ein trauriger ungriechischer Hypochondrist" whom he was glad to lay aside in favor of some more cheerful Greek.²⁰⁷ Menander, whom Goethe admired so deeply, is "durchaus * * * heiter."²⁰⁸ In defending Ovid against Herder's criticism he said that "für eine jugendliche Phantasie nichts erfreulicher sein könne, als in jenen heitern * * * Gegenden mit Göttern zu verweilen",²⁰⁹ and in the hard days of 1815 Goethe says of a translation of Ovid that had just reached him: "sie liest sich gar angenehm und in so wilden kriegerischen Zeiten ist die Heiterkeit des glücklichen Römers höchst willkommen."²¹⁰

²⁰⁰ G3, 203.

²⁰¹ IV 6, 400.

²⁰² III 13, 48; G4, 347.

²⁰³ I 41¹ 361.

²⁰⁴ III 12, 314.

²⁰⁵ G3, 450.

²⁰⁶ I 36, 314.

²⁰⁷ I 41² 211.

²⁰⁸ G3, 203.

²⁰⁹ I 27, 319.

²¹⁰ IV 25, 317.

It is to be noted that the *Metamorphoses* were always a great favorite with Goethe.²¹¹ Ancient writings are not classic because they are ancient, but because, among other things, they are "froh."²¹² Even the Greek language itself is more suited than the Latin to a "heiterer Vortrag glücklicher Naturansichten."²¹³

(20) *Earnestness, seriousness.* But the other side, the serious one, of course, also receives attention. "Der hohe Ernst" is one of the qualities which, Goethe says, raise Aeschylus and Sophocles as artists above Euripides.²¹⁴ "Ernst" too, is one of the admirable qualities of the *Anthology*.²¹⁵ When Gerhard wished to dedicate his translation of Anacreon to Carl August, Goethe advises him not to do so, for more serious productions should be chosen for this purpose.²¹⁶ And, in the series of contrasts, referred to above, between ancient and modern romantic literature, where the advantage lies so preponderately on the side of the ancient, it is romanticism that borders on the comic, while the ancient borders "ans Ernste und Würdige."²¹⁷

(21) The quality of intellect (Verstand) is a necessary one in epic poetry, Goethe says,²¹⁸ speaking of the *Odyssey*. Euripides seems to possess it more than the other two tragedians; of his lost *Philoctetes* Goethe says: "Gerühmt wird grosse Sorgfalt und Scharfsinn."²¹⁹ And of the *Bacchae* he says: "Kann man * * * die Verblendung der Menschen geistreicher darstellen, als es hier geschehen ist?"²²⁰ Aristophanes' "geistreiche Scherze" are spoken of.²²¹ After reading Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1797 Goethe says: "es ist eine schöne Sache um den Verstand in seiner höchsten Erscheinung."²²² One of the great qualities that make up the charm of the *Anthology* is "der grosse Verstand."²²³ Of *Daphnis and*

²¹¹ Cf. my thesis.

²¹² G1, 343.

²¹³ II 3, 201.

²¹⁴ G3, 360.

²¹⁵ IV 6, 400.

²¹⁶ IV 27, 251.

²¹⁷ G1, 534.

²¹⁸ IV 12, 101.

²¹⁹ I 42^a 461.

²²⁰ G4, 435.

²²¹ I 36, 328.

²²² IV 12, 106.

²²³ IV 6, 400.

Chloe, Goethe says it is a masterpiece, "worin Verstand, Kunst *** auf ihrem höchsten Gipfel erscheinen."²²⁴ This same quality (dieser grosse Verstand) attracts Goethe to the old Romans in general;²²⁵ of Cicero in particular he says that he finds in the oration *Pro Sexto Roscio* not only faults but also "grosser Verstand."²²⁶ The Greek language itself is more suited to a "geistreicher Vortrag" than is the Latin.²²⁷

(22) *Feeling, emotion.* But on the other hand, the poet who is merely intellectual and who lacks feeling has, in Goethe's opinion, no great claim to the name of poet; "Armer Mensch, an dem der Kopf alles ist!" he says of such poets.²²⁸ In commenting on the statement that the correct poet is no great poetic genius, Goethe says: "Wenn man Homer liest, so kann man sich *** nicht enthalten, eben das von Virgil zu sagen."²²⁹ In two other places Goethe refers to this quality in Homer; in *Werther* a passage of Homer is spoken of as "innig" and "geheimnisvoll";²³⁰ and in a letter of 1787 we read: "Die Beschreibungen (in Homer), die Gleichnisse *** sind *** mit einer *** Innigkeit gezeichnet, vor der man erschrickt."²³¹ And as Homer is to Virgil, so Pindar is to Horace: "Die Präzision des Horaz nöthigte die Deutschen *** sich ihm gleichzustellen. *** Wir besassen nunmehr (in eighteenth century German literature) wo nicht einen Pindar, doch einen Horaz."²³² Another utterance on Horace expresses a similar view: "Sein poetisches Talent anerkannt nur in Absicht auf technische und Sprachvollkommenheit, d.h., Nachbildung der griechischen Metra und der poetischen Sprache, nebst einer furchtbaren Realität ohne alle Poesie, besonders in den Oden."²³³ In contrast to the times of the ancient Greek poets, the genius of modern times is smothered by "unsere empfindungslose Lebensart, wenn die Sänger freier Zeiten es nicht erwärmen."²³⁴ Nonnus

²²⁴ G4, 342.

²²⁵ G2, 325.

²²⁶ G3, 207.

²²⁷ II 3, 201.

²²⁸ IV 2, 15.

²²⁹ I 38, 369.

²³⁰ I 19, 110.

²³¹ I 31, 238.

²³² I 27, 93.

²³³ G1, 458.

²³⁴ I 37, 217.

is "ein gefühlvoller Poet."²³⁵ Plato is the man of "Geist und Gemüth."²³⁶ In this connection may be mentioned Goethe's interest in mystic literature, an interest that was considerable, especially in the Orphic writings and in Plotinus, of whom he speaks as "der wunderbare Mystiker."²³⁷ With Plato's saying that wonder is the mother of all that is beautiful and good, Goethe heartily agrees,²³⁸ and in another place²³⁹ he speaks of "die heilige Scheu" with which Plato approaches nature, and of "jenes Erstaunen, das *** den Philosophen so gut kleidet." Compare in *Faust*:

"Doch im Erstarren such' ich nicht mein Heil,
Das Schaudern ist der Menschheit bestes Teil;
Wie auch die Welt ihm das *Gefühl* verteure,
Ergriffen, fühlt er tief das Ungeheure."²⁴⁰

(23) *Good taste.* This quality receives little mention, probably because Goethe assumes it in all real works of art; cf. "Der Geschmack ist dem Genie angeboren."²⁴¹ But he does mention it twice in connection with *Daphnis and Chloe*.²⁴²

(24) *Beauty.* "Das Erhabene verkörpert sich im Schönen," says Goethe.²⁴³ Greek tragedy becomes beautiful through "das mildernde Schönheitsprinzip."²⁴⁴ Thucydides and Herodotus are read by Goethe for their form and not for their content.²⁴⁵ Goethe has little use for the Cynic philosophy, because it constantly violates forms,²⁴⁶ while of Plato, whom he admired so deeply, he says: "Alles was er äussert, bezieht sich auf ein ewig *** Schönes, dessen Forderung er in jedem Busen aufzuregen strebt."²⁴⁷ The *Daphnis and Chloe* is praised for its "Schönheit,"²⁴⁸ and Virgil is

²³⁵ IV 24, 259.

²³⁶ II 11, 150.

²³⁷ IV 19, 68.

²³⁸ G1, 347.

²³⁹ II 3, 113.

²⁴⁰ I. 6271ff.

²⁴¹ I 45, 176.

²⁴² G4, 342 and 347.

²⁴³ IV 43, 165.

²⁴⁴ I 47, 166.

²⁴⁵ IV 12, 378.

²⁴⁶ G4, 469.

²⁴⁷ II 3, 138.

²⁴⁸ G4, 347.

"der schöne Virgil."²⁴⁹ In fact, even though the other ancient literatures contain great treasures, yet the Greek and Latin have handed down to us precious gifts "die an Gehalt dem übrigen Besten gleich, der Form nach allem andern vorzuziehen sind."²⁵⁰

(25) *Rhythm, melody.* In 1774 Goethe quotes a "recipe" for learning to read Homer; it runs in part as follows: "fang an zu lesen die Ilias, achte nicht auf Accente, sondern lies wie die Melodey des Hexameters dahinfliest und es Dir schön klinge in der Seele."²⁵¹ In 1780 he speaks of a German translation that he had made of certain Greek verses as being "in einer unmelodischern *** Sprache, wenigstens durch meinen Mund und Feder."²⁵² In 1786 he has the following to say about the rhythm of the *Electra* of Sophocles: "Die langen Iamben ohne Abschnitt und das sonderbare Wälzen und Rollen des Periods, haben sich mir so eingeprägt, dass mir nun die kurzen Zeilen der Iphigenie (his own) ganz höckerig, übelklingend und unlesbar werden."²⁵³ In 1814 Nonnus is spoken of as "ein *** wundersam *** rhythmisch geübter Poet."²⁵⁴

(26) *Technic.* Even this somewhat external quality receives praise in a few cases. So, for example, the ability of Sophocles as a playwright is mentioned: "er kannte die Bretter und verstand sein Metier wie einer."²⁵⁵ In Euripides Goethe admires "die grosse tragisch-rhetorische Technik";²⁵⁶ also his "grösste Gewandtheit."²⁵⁷ And here again the oft-cited *Daphnis and Chloe* has a place; Goethe speaks of its "vortrefflicher Plan" and of its "glückliche Bearbeitung."²⁵⁸ And yet that this quality is after all, in Goethe's opinion, of little value unless accompanied by other more important ones, is clear from the statement quoted above (sec. 22) on Horace.

(27) *Rhetoric.* This is a quality of especial value to the dramatist; Goethe calls attention to the prominence of argumentation in

²⁴⁹ IV 14, 181.

²⁵⁰ I 36, 330.

²⁵¹ IV 2, 205.

²⁵² IV 4, 283.

²⁵³ IV 8, 8.

²⁵⁴ IV 24, 259.

²⁵⁵ G3, 351.

²⁵⁶ III 13, 169.

²⁵⁷ Ib. 177.

²⁵⁸ IV 22, 181.

Greek tragedy, and to the good use that the Greek tragedians, and still more the comedians, made of it.²⁵⁹ Riemer quotes him as saying: "In der Sprache des griechischen Dramas ist unter andern ein auffallendes Verstandesspiel, eine Freude an witzigen Repliken."²⁶⁰ In his notes to the *Divan*, Goethe speaks of "abgebrochene Wechselreden" as being "die schönste Zierde des Dramas."²⁶¹ Sophocles possesses this quality in a rare degree, and right here, says Goethe, is the life of his drama; the spectator is always on the side of the last speaker.²⁶² Once, however, in Goethe's view, Sophocles carries this ability too far, and that is where Antigone argues that her brother is the most precious of her relatives.²⁶³ In Euripides, too, Goethe finds much to admire on this point; he speaks of his "hohe sittliche Rhetorik";²⁶⁴ and yet, where Sophocles in one case went too far, Euripides is prone to do so frequently.²⁶⁵ Goethe defends Virgil's story of Laocoön as a rhetorical argument,²⁶⁶ and of Seneca he says that some of his descriptions are "wirklich köstlich, wenn man den rhetorischen Stil einmal zugeben will."²⁶⁷

(28) *Contrasts.* This element of the *Phaethon* of Euripides seems to be largely responsible for Goethe's admiration of this play, for he refers to it three times; thus he speaks of a contrast in this play "welcher schöner nicht gedacht werden kann";²⁶⁸ another very effective contrast is referred to,²⁶⁹ and then he closes with the words: "Wie viel liesse sich nicht über die * * * Grossheit auch dieses Stücks rühmen * * *, da es * * * uns * * * mit bedeutenden Gegensätzen * * * ergötzt und belehrt."²⁷⁰

(29) *Urbanity.* In Terence Goethe admires among other things "die allerzarteste theatralische Urbanität."²⁷¹

(30) *Wisdom.* A quality of life, rather than of literature alone, that Goethe admires in the ancients, is wisdom. Here again one

²⁵⁹ I 42² 470.

²⁶⁰ G2, 255.

²⁶¹ I 7, 118.

²⁶² G3, 351.

²⁶³ *Antigone*, 905ff.

²⁶⁴ III 13, 177.

²⁶⁵ G4, 395.

²⁶⁶ I 47, 116.

²⁶⁷ II 3, 126.

²⁶⁸ I 41² 40.

²⁶⁹ Ib.

²⁷⁰ Ib. 63.

²⁷¹ III 12, 314.

thinks of Goethe himself, especially in his old age, "der weise Goethe." The "Naturweisheit" of Euripides is spoken of,²⁷² Socrates and Plutarch, the former so deeply admired, the latter so devotedly read, are both 'wise' men.²⁷³ "Die anmutige Weisheit römischer Schriftsteller" was one of the things that drew Goethe to that literature,²⁷⁴ and as for Greek literature, he mentions as one of the great characteristics that are found in every field of it "die hohe Lebensweisheit."²⁷⁵

(31) *Unmorality.* Finally we have unmorality, or non-morality, a quality that Goethe finds it necessary to insist upon, merely because some people demand that a work of literature be moral, a requirement which Goethe objects to. Thus he is opposed to the view that the *Iliad* is a moral poem;²⁷⁶ he says that Polygnotus, in his painting representing Ulysses' descent to Hades, has added a moral that was not in the *Odyssey*.²⁷⁷ Homer must not even be required to be just (e.g., where he shows himself in sympathy with the unjust Odysseus), because as soon as this requirement is laid upon poetry, it ceases to be poetry and becomes prose.²⁷⁸ As long as Goethe saw nothing more in Theognis than a "pädagogisch-rigorosier Moralist" he had no use for him, and turned to more attractive Greek writers.²⁷⁹ And one of the points of the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles that appeal to Goethe is the following: "Das Stück enthält nicht viele Sittensprüche noch Ermahnung zu Tugenden."²⁸⁰ And for this same reason Goethe disagrees with Hinrichs' theory that morality (das Sittliche) is the essence of Greek tragedy; Goethe sees the essence rather in "das rein Menschliche in seinem ganzen Umfange."²⁸¹

In conclusion: May we not say, then, that the above list furnishes a fairly definite answer to the question asked at the beginning of this article, as to what there was about the ancient classical literature that attracted Goethe so strongly? These quali-

²⁷² I 41² 243.

²⁷³ I 27, 12 and I 42¹ 92.

²⁷⁴ I 24, 295.

²⁷⁵ G3, 387.

²⁷⁶ I 38, 336.

²⁷⁷ G1, 348.

²⁷⁸ I 49¹ 92.

²⁷⁹ I 41² 211.

²⁸⁰ I 42² 463.

²⁸¹ G3, 353.

ties, especially the more important ones, viz., moderation, simplicity, unity, artistic finish, clearness, and, above all, realism, made him the faithful admirer, almost worshipper, of this part of the world's literature.

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